THE USE OF PODCASTS AND CREATION OF PODCASTS IN THE CLASSROOM AND HOW THEY AFFECT STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

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Introduction

I chose to do my research on podcast use in the classroom and how it affects learning. It is important to teach our students to use the Web 2.0 tools educationally so that they will be more competitive in the new global world. The students know how to use these tools already. Why not have them use them in the classroom? Niemuth states that, “…some students spend five hours per school day in front of screens, including computer, mobile, and television screens…” (2010, p. 24) One could provide an authentic lesson with real-world implications. The students will feel like they have learned something and produced something worth-while. These tools make the lesson more exciting to them. They will be more engaged in the lesson and therefore be more successful. My research question is “How does the use/creation of podcasts enhance student achievement?”

Tool Description

As Richardson stated, “Podcasting is basically the creation and distribution of amateur radio, plain and simple. (2006, p.112) There’s not much to producing a podcast. “Podcasting is a fairly cheap technology and is user friendly enough that elementary through high school students can integrate it into their school work and projects with ease.” (Purcell, 2011, p. 48) All that one needs to create a podcast is “a computer, microphone, Internet access, and free audio-mixing software...” (Purcell, 2011, p. 48) A lot of times, students have MP3 players that are able to record. (Purcell, 2011, p. 48)

Students can access podcasts that are already made to enhance learning. They can also create them on their own. To do this, they could go to [www.podomatic.com](http://www.podomatic.com) , create an account and follow the simple directions to make a podcast there. Podcasting is a great way to create student-centered lessons. Students can collaborate to make a real-life product that can be shared with the world.

Enhanced Student Learning

Podcasting enhances student learning in many ways. One way is that they can download a lesson to be played over and over again. Repetition is important in a many subjects, especially foreign language learning. There are many ways that podcasts can be used in the foreign language classroom. Here are some examples from Niemuth’s article.

“Download a podcast and play it for the class. Then build a discussion around it, or test listening comprehension. Podcasts are more up-to-date than most audio recordings provided by the textbook companies. Many are also instructional and use the language in real-life situations.” (2010, p. 25)

I think that students would be more interested in the speaking activities if they were more “life-like.” The activities that my textbook supplies are definitely out-of –date (1980’s). The students find them funny, but most of the time they don’t pertain to their life. I believe that if the activity is interesting and relevant to the students’ lives, students will be excited about learning/doing the activity and perform better on the task. Podcasts would help supplement more relevant material.

Niemuth also says, “Give students a podcast or two a week and let them listen on their MP3 player (or computer) on their own time (walking to school, waiting for the bus, in their car.)” (2010, p. 25) I think that this is a great activity to help improve the students’ listening skills. Most students that I teach have an MP3 player and/or computer. Many students that I teach have a long ride to school. This would be a great time to get the assignment completed. It is something they can do when they want, however it instills responsibility in them since these are to be done each week. I think the students’ affective filter should be low too. Sometimes students “shut down” in class because they are afraid of being wrong. They can listen to the podcast as many times as they need to get the meaning.

A study by Christopher P. Long shows how podcasting fosters cooperative education. In his university class about Ancient Greek Philosophy, he wanted the students to use “blogging and podcasting to empower students to take an active role in their own education.” (Long, 2010, p. 348) He set up the course around the principle “that education is a *cooperative* activity best pursued in social environments in which the student and teacher together participate.” (Long, 2010 p. 348) Cooperative education is important in today’s society because employers are looking for people who can work together to produce something. He had the students participate in blogs and listen to podcasts. He talked about blogging more than podcasting. The results from his study state that blogging and podcasting help foster cooperative education. (Long, 2010, p. 359) By using these tools, students learn from the teacher and the teacher learns from the students. (Long, 2010, p. 359)

Another study suggests that student-created podcasts fosters learning objectives.

“When students produce a podcast it instantly creates the need for teamwork, communication, organization technical literacy, and planning, as well as the ability to research and write up the podcast topic and script. All of these are desired skills for enhancing students’ abilities.” (Armstrong, Massad & Tucker, 2009, p. 149)

Armstrong et al., (2009) also identified that “ Podcasts are a creative outlet for students to express ideas, share perceptions, debate issues, and bring experts to the classroom. Creating a podcast provides engaging opportunities for students to develop desirable skills as digital storytellers, commentators, and cutting-edge communicators.” (p. 149)

In their study, their college business students (in groups) had to interview a business person. (Armstrong et al., 2009, p. 150) The teams had to “prepare a script” to use during the interview and write a thank you letter to the interviewee after the interview. (Armstrong et al., 2009 p. 150) Each member of the team had different responsibilities to help complete the podcast such as, “researching the topic, preparing questions, asking the questions, locating royalty-free background music, publishing , and presenting the final research report to the class.” (Armstrong et al., 2009, p. 150)

It was evident in their findings that the students were enthusiastic about doing this project. They thought that it was fun, interesting and were proud of the product they produced. (Armstrong et al., 2009, p. 151) One student said that, “The media experience was irreplaceable, now I am now capable of creating a multimedia presentation.” (Armstrong et al., 2009, p. 151) They concluded that, “By producing podcasts, students have the opportunity to research analyze information communicate effectively, and incorporate the opinions of expert in a cutting edge-way.” (Armstrong et al., 2009, p. 151) Teachers need to assign groups and group jobs and assessment. (Armstrong et al., 2009, p. 151) They suggested having the groups turn in weekly “progress reports” so you know where the groups are in the project. (Armstrong et al., 2009, p. 151)

They also come to a conclusion that,

“It is during the planning phase that students will learn to develop communication goals for their podcasts (business fundamentals), what question questions to ask (critical thinking), and how to get coordinated with others (team work). All of these skills are desired outcomes for enhancing students’ abilities and the prepare them to be managers of the future.” (Armstrong et al., 2009, p. 152)

From the results of this study, one can see that the creating of podcasts by students enhances many of the skills that are needed in the global world/work place besides educational goals.

Even more, a study about using podcasts in the middle school classroom with ELL students produces positive results. These students created podcasts to perfect their English pronunciation. (Neufeld & Smythe, 2010, p. 488) What came about was besides perfecting their technique for creating podcasts, they corrected each other’s pronunciation and grammar mistakes, thus helping each other learn in a non-threatening way. (Neufeld & Smythe, 2010, p. 494) Students would even use their “in-between time” to complete/work on assignments. (Neufeld & Smythe, 2010 p. 494) The conversations while working collaboratively also helped the students understand each other’s different cultures with a sense of pride. (Neufeld & Smythe, 2010, p. 495)

Finally, a small positive result came out of a study at an Italian university. Some teacher created podcast of their lectures which were then available on-line for students to download. (Lazzari, 2009, p. 28-29) These classes were either all on-line or partially on-line. (Lazzari, 2009, p. 29) If the classes were partially on-line, the podcasts would be available before the tests for review. (Lazzari, 2009, p. 29) In communications classes and foreign language classes, students were to create and use podcasts as well. (Lazzari, 2009, p. 29)

Lazzari compared the 2004-2005 school year with the 2005-2006 school year. The results showed that there was “a considerable increase” in achievement in full-time students. (Lazzari, 2009, p. 30) The numbers for the part-time students were about the same. (Lazzari, 2009, p. 30) The results also state that “textbooks were only slightly more effective when studying a subject, whereas podcasts and notes are more significantly preferred for reviewing something already learned in preparation for an exam.” (Lazarri, 2009, p. 31) Students also felt that the creation of podcast was beneficial for learning the subject and gaining technology experience especially in the areas of “foreign languages (highest scores) to geography…” (Lazzari, 2009, p. 31) Results also showed that while creating podcasts the students reflected on their work, not just on their recordings. (Lazzari, 2009, p. 31) Students creating podcasts showed “a mature and proactive approach to learning.” (Lazzari, 2009, p. 31)

Improving Teacher Efficacy

There are many ways in which podcasts can help improve teacher efficacy. One way is by having podcast available about the class so students could use them to study for the test. (Lazzari, 2009, p. 31) By having the lesson available on a podcast, a student who is absent can download it and not fall behind the class. (Purcell, 2011, p. 49) These podcasts could be also used to help special needs students. Students can download and listen to them over and over again. (Purcell, 2011, p. 49) A student with ADHD could listen to the podcast of the day’s lesson at home where there are less distractions. (Purcell, 2011, p. 49) These students could also go to the resource room or library to listen to them. Students could also listen to the day’s materials before class (if you have them prepared ahead of time). (Purcell, 2011, p. 49) To compensate for students who do not have an MP3 player or a computer, teachers cold “burn the audio files…to have access to the material at other locations. (Purcell, 2011, p. 49) “Through podcasts, educators can reach far beyond their classrooms.” (Podcasting in the Classroom, 2008)

The use of podcasts in foreign language learning is very important. By using podcasts, students will need “to apply those acquired foreign language skills in actual or simulated real-time, real-life interactions.” (Niemuth, 2010, p. 24) One of the best ways to learn a foreign language is to be immersed in the language and culture. Podcasting reinforces this in and out of the classroom. (Niemuth, 2010, p. 26) Once the podcast is on the student’s MP3 player, it is available to them whenever they want to use it.

Using podcasts also hits different multiple intelligences. Our learners are very diverse and we need to reach all of them the best we can. The use and creation of podcasts can reach many students in a variety of ways. (Kim, 2011, p. 638) By using podcasts you are reaching visual learners and auditory learners. (Kim, 2011, p. 640)

In my classroom, I plan to use podcasts in many ways. One is to record myself and/or native speaker, so that the students get more authentic listening practice. I would also like individual students to create voice podcasts of themselves so I can evaluate their pronunciation. I am going to have students record their conversations and play them back to the class for speaking and listening practice and evaluation. I am also going to have them produce video podcasts or vodcasts in groups also for listening and speaking practice and evaluation. In the future I would like to create a “library” of podcasted lessons that the students could download for extra practice or if they missed time from school. This would be helpful to the students who cannot stay after school because they do not have a ride home and need to get extra help.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the use of podcasts in and out of the classroom enhances student learning. The use of podcasts and creation of podcasts had a positive result in all studies. With a portable audio device, students can listen to podcasts at anytime and anywhere. This can be beneficial for the students who need to make up work or for the student with special needs. Podcasts reach many students because they hit many learning styles. The use of podcasts and creating podcasts is important in foreign language learning because of its authenticity and use of audio and video to help learners. Podcasting and the use of podcasts makes learning more fun and desirable across all age groups.

Of course, as with all new technologies, educators need to be trained on how to use these and practice what they expect the students to do before giving the assignment to the students. This can be accomplished through professional development, taking a technology class or by listening or reading a podcast or blog on their own. With a positive and flexible attitude, teachers will be successful in implementing the use of podcasts and/or the creation of podcasts in their lessons. It is important to train students how to use podcasts and other Web 2.0 technologies educationally so that they will be successful in their future careers.

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